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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 000169

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF A/S FRAZER, AF/SPG, SE WILLIAMSON, ADDIS
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SUBJECT: SPLM'S DEMOCRACY AND DARFUR PLANS TAKE SHAPE

REF: KHARTOUM 130

Classified By: CDA Alberto M. Fernandez, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: SPLM leader Yassir Arman reports that the party has received a greenlight from the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) to intensify its efforts to secure peace in Darfur and improve relations with the United States. He outlined an ambitious program of SPLM political mobilization aimed at Northern Sudan while pointing out that progress on the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) is taking place, albeit slowly, while abuses of human rights of party cadres continue by the security services. End summary.

GREENLIGHT ON DARFUR MEDIATION?

12. (C) CDA Fernandez met Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) Deputy SG Yassir Arman on February 2 at party headquarters to discuss the outcome of recent intense discussions between the SPLM and NCP on Sudan's political future. Arman said that one upshot of the discussion was NCP acquiescence to the SPLM playing a larger role in Darfur as part of the Government of National Unity's efforts to solve the crisis. Responding to Charge's look of disbelief, Arman said "yes, it's true, at first they were very suspicious" but the SPLM even briefed the NCP's chief Darfur negotiator, hardliner Nafie Ali Nafie, who accepted the concept. "With Nafie, it is easy, because he is black or white and he is at least honest in his opposition," he joked. The aim is to solve Darfur once and for all in 2008 through achieving a political settlement thereby making national elections in 2009 credible. The SPLM would continue its efforts to unite the rebel factions and make a special effort of outreach to SLM leader Abdulwahid Nur. "We told the NCP, there are two strategies at work here: you want to divide the Darfur factions in order to weaken them, we want to unite them to make peace." SPLM leaders explained to the NCP team on CPA implementation, led by Nafie and VP Ali Osman Taha, that it is in the NCP's interest to have an empowered, effective counterpart in Darfur with whom they can make peace, otherwise the violence will continue and could eventually drag down the entire country to ruin.

13. (C) Arman said that the SPLM had made a similar point "about the need for the NCP to change its ways" if indeed it wants to see an improvement in US-Sudan relations. He added that, based on Salva Kiir's November 2007 visit to Washington, the SPLM explained that the Bush Administration does not seek to destroy the NCP's hold on power, "they honestly want to solve Darfur peacefully" and the NCP should

stop being so paranoid. Arman noted that the SPLM had explained that most of the US Congress and civil society and lobbies in the US are strongly opposed to the Khartoum regime "so it is best to make a deal with the Americans now before it is too late."

THE NCP'S FAVORED METHODS OF INTIMIDATION

¶4. (C) CDA countered that the NCP seemed to be emboldened by recent events in Kenya and Chad and that there seemed to be a disconnect between the SPLM's brief to improve relations with the U.S. and recent aggressive regime actions against UNAMID, in Chad, against the US Embassy and even in igniting a range war in Northern Bahr al-Ghazal against the SPLM. Arman admitted that the NCP "cannot really be trusted but we have to try to solve these problems, and not just give up." Arman, who had an intelligence background when he was an SPLA commander, opined that "Deby is probably finished, Salah Ghosh finally succeeded in toppling him after repeated tries, but we think Kenya will eventually straighten out."

¶5. (C) Yassir said that there was slow, steady progress on many CPA-related fronts but certainly the North-South border issue had heated up (reftel) and other problems remained. CDA asked about SPLM cadres still imprisoned by Sudanese Intelligence, specifically SPLM youth leader Yien Mathew. Arman said that they were still imprisoned although the SPLM was able to rescue one: SPLM Secretary for Media and Culture for Khartoum State Ammar Najmeddin al-Jak (who was arrested on November 23, 2007 when boarding a flight to Juba) had been furloughed in late January as part of deal with NISS Director Salah Ghosh. The SPLM had then found out that Al-Jak "had

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been severely tortured and even molested" while in detention. So they had spirited him away to South Sudan before the furlough expired and he was now sought by the security services "but at least he is safe for now."

¶6. (C) While engaging with the NCP on political issues, the SPLM was also making ambitious plans for strengthening its outreach in the North. The party's National Convention would take place May 10-16, probably in Khartoum, and would ratify Salva Kiir as party chairman replacing the late John Garang. They were also energizing party cadres to perform imaginative works of activism to reach out to Khartoum's multi-million person underclass. This included social work with the poor, environmental cleanup targeting garbage pickup and road beautification, planting trees throughout arid North Sudan, and high-profile voluntary construction work to help poor families. "You should see SPLM leaders picking up garbage and hammering nails," he laughed. The SPLM-affiliated New Sudan Doctors Association and New Sudan Lawyers Association would also begin offering their services free of charge one day a week.

¶7. (C) Comment: Yassir Arman is a canny veteran of the SPLM's decades-long struggle against the domination of the NCP who certainly knows his opponent. But we can't fail to see an element of hopeful naivete in the party's good faith efforts to solve Darfur, improve relations with the US, and promote populist democracy in Sudan. Certainly they have identified the right issues and their heart is in the right place, but perhaps overestimate their own capacity to affect change and the willingness of a hermetic NCP to allow them to actually carry it out. Their ambitions do underscore the needed for intensifying American engagement to strengthen the SPLM's (and GOSS - Government of South Sudan) capacity to govern and to advocate for their policies. End comment.

FERNANDEZ